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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000166

SIPDIS

BAGHDAD FOR AMBASSADOR ERELI
DEPARTMENT FOR S/WCI AND NEA

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SUBJECT: S/WCI AMBASSADOR WILLIAMSON'S VISIT TO MANAMA

REF: MANAMA 39

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Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: A Bahraini MFA official said that the GOB would consider the USG's request to accept non-Bahraini Guantanamo detainees as a gesture of respect to the Obama administration's commitment to close the facility. He added that Bahrain would try to convince Yemen to find a compromise that would allow for the transfer of high-risk Yemeni detainees to Saudi Arabia to take advantage of the Saudis' rehabilitation program. End summary.

¶2. (S) S/WCI Ambassador-at-Large Clint Williamson, accompanied by A/DCM and S/WCI officer Shaun Coughlin, met with MFA Undersecretary Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa on January 19 to present a letter from the Secretary to Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa encouraging Bahrain's cooperation in closing Guantanamo.

¶3. (S) Ambassador Williamson thanked Abdulaziz for the GOB's consideration of a January request to accept detainees (reftel), but explained that President Obama had undertaken a new, concerted effort to close the Guantanamo detention facility - a message reinforced by his Executive Order issued shortly after taking office. The President and the Secretary recognize the damage Guantanamo has done to our relations in the region and feel strongly that until this issue is resolved, it will continue to be an impediment to our foreign policy. For the USG to be successful in this effort, however, we would need the help of friends and allies. Accordingly, the Secretary had asked Williamson to come to Manama to discuss this with the GOB. Abdulaziz said that the GOB would consider the request, adding that with several months to examine the issue, it was more likely that there might be a positive response. He cautioned, however, that the political decision would be taken at the highest levels and in consultation with the security apparatus (the Bahrain National Security Agency and the Ministry of Interior). Abdulaziz said that as the GOB considered the request, it might avail itself of Williamson's offer of detailed information on individual detainees, and facilitation of interviews at Guantanamo.

¶4. (S) Abdulaziz was particularly interested in the anticipated number of detainees who might be transferred and about U.S. concerns on transferring some detainees to their home countries. Ambassador Williamson explained that,

following an interagency review being led by the Justice Department, we anticipate prosecuting a certain number and transferring the bulk of the 240 detainees back to their home countries. He added that there would likely be a group of 50-60 Tunisians, Syrians, Libyans, Egyptians, Uzbeks, and Uighurs that we would want to transfer to third countries due to humane treatment concerns. He explained that we had experienced problems with Tunisia and Libya in their treatment of returnees and that we had grave concerns with respect to Syria. Williamson was hopeful that we would be able to resettle the Uzbeks and Uighurs in Europe. Abdulaziz promised to pass the letter to Sheikh Khalid and said he would recommend that the GOB look closely at our request. He added that Bahrain has great respect for President Obama and his efforts to "open America's fist."

15. (S) The two discussed the success of Saudi Arabia's rehabilitation program, particularly in countering the potential for returnees to exert ideological influence on their peers. Williamson noted that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had tried unsuccessfully to convince Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to permit the transfer of 99 Yemeni detainees to Saudi Arabia. The Saudis, he said, had a facility near the Yemeni border and were prepared to fund the rehabilitation program and bring the detainees' families to Saudi Arabia for the duration of the program. He asked Bahrain to encourage the Yemenis to work toward a compromise with the U.S. and Saudis. Abdulaziz immediately saw the concern with transferring high-risk detainees to Yemen, noting that the ROYG simply did not have the resources to deal with them properly and that the risk of escape was too high. He said Bahrain would do all it could to convince the Yemenis on the point.

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16. (C) As an aside, Abdulaziz asked how the USG viewed the ICC arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Bashir. Williamson said that the United States was supportive of the ICC investigation into crimes in Darfur and felt strongly that responsible persons should be held accountable. Abdulaziz said that Bahrain agreed that accountability was important but he wondered if this was the right way to achieve it. He suggested that other individuals who might be even more deserving, such as President Mugabe, were not subject to ICC investigations while Bashir was singled out. Williamson responded that while international justice efforts were neither perfect nor all-encompassing, there had been widespread agreement that the situation in Darfur, and the scale of crimes committed there, justified the UNSC referral of the case to the ICC. He added that while some governments, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, had urged the UNSC to grant an Article 16 deferral of the prosecution, the USG could not support such an approach.

17. (U) Ambassador Williamson has cleared this message.

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